THE LAST SHOT

by FREDERICK PALMER

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays Marta Galland and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westerling of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in his aeroplane.

CHAPTER II—Ten years later. Westerling, nominal vice but real chief of staff, reinforces South La Tir, meditates on war, and speculates on the comparative ages of himself and Marta, who is visiting in the Gray Capital.

CHAPTER III—Westerling calls on Marta. She tells him of her teaching children the follies of war and martial patriotism, begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff, and predicts that if he makes war against the Browns he will not win.

CHAPTER IV—On the march with the 53rd of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, decries war and played-out patrotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron overhearng, begs him off saying the anarchist will fight well when enraged and is "all man."

CHAPTER V—Lanstron calls on Marta at her home. He talks with Feller, the gardner. Marta tells Lanstrom that she believes Feller to be a spy. Lanstron conffesses it is true.

CHAPTER VI—Lanstron shows Marta a telephone which Feller has concealed in a secret passage under the tower for use to benefit the Browns in war emergencies, pointing out its value as being in the center of the fighting zone in case of war. Marta consents for it and Feller to remain for the present. Lanstron declares his love for Marta.

CHAPTER VII—Westerling and the Gray premier plan to use a trivial international affair to forment warlike patriotism in army and people and striking before declaring war. Partow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble, and the Brown defenses. Partow reveals his plans to Lanstron.

"Declarations of war before striking, by nations taking the aggressive, are a disadvantage," Westerling explained. "They are going out of practice. Witness the examples of Japan against Russia and the Balkan allies against Turkey. In these days declarations are not necessary as a warning of what is going to happen. They belong to the etiquette of fencers."

"Yes, exactly. The declaration of war and the ambassador's passports will be prepared and the wire that fighting has begun will release them," agreed the premier.

"Yet if we did lose! If when I had given you all you ask your plans went wrong! If our army were broken to pieces on the frontier and then the nation, kept in ignorance of events, learned the truth"—the premier enunciated slowly and pointedly while he locked glances with Westerling—"that is the end for us both. You would hardly want to return to the capital to face public wrath!"

"We must win though we lose a million men!" he answered. "I stake my life!" he cried hoarsely, striking his fist on the table.

"You stake your life!" repeated the premier with slow emphasis.

"I do!" said Westerling. "Yes, my life. We cannot fail!"

"Then it will be war, if the people want it!" said the premier. "I shall not resist their desire!" he added in his official manner, at peace with his conscience.

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Partow was a great brain set on an enormous body. Partow's eyes had the fire of youth at sixty-five, but the pendulous flesh of his cheeks was pasty. Jealousy and faction had endeavored for years to remove him from his position at the head of the army on account of age. New governments decided as they came in that he must go, and they went out with him still in the saddle.

Let officers apply themselves with conspicuous energy and they heard from a genial Partow; let officers only keep step and free of courts martial, and they heard from a merciless taskmaster. Peculiarly human, peculiarly dictatorial, dynamic, and inscrutable was Partow, who never asked any one under him to work harder than himself.

Lanstron appeared in the presence of Jove shortly after eight o'clock the next morning after he left La Tir. Jove rolled his big head on his short neck in a nod and said:

"Late!"

"The train was late, sir," Lanstron replied, "and I have some news about our thousandth chance."

"Hm-m! What is it?" asked Partow. When Lanstron had told his story, Partow worked his lips in a way he had if he were struck by a passing reflection which might or might not have a connection with the subject in hand. "Strange about her when you consider who her parents were!" he said. "But you never know. Hm-m! Why don't you sit down, young man?"

"The way that the Grays gave out our dispatch convinces me of their intentions," Partow said. "Their people are rising to it and ours are rising in answer. The Grays have been transferring regiments from distant provinces to their frontier because they will fight better in an invasion. We are transferring home regiments to our frontier because they will fight for their own property. By Thursday you will find that open mobilization on both sides has begun."

"My department is ready," said Lanston, "all except your decision about press censorship."

"A troublesome point," responded Partow. "I have procrastinated because two definite plans were fully worked out. It is a matter of choice between them: either publicity or complete secrecy. You know I am no believer in riding two horses at once. My mind is about made up; but let me hear your side again. Sometimes I get conviction by probing another man's."

Lanstron was at his best, for his own conviction was intense.

"Of course they will go in for secrecy; but our case is different," he began.

Partow settled himself to listen with the gift of the organizer who draws from his informant the brevity of essentials.

"I should take the people into our confidence," Lanstron proceeded. "I should make them feel that we were one family fighting for all we hold dear against the invader. If our losses are heavy, if we have a setback, then the inspiration of the heroism of those who have fallen and the danger of their own homes feeling the foot of the invader next will impel the living to greater sacrifices. For the Grays are in the wrong. The moral and the legal right is with us."

"And the duty of men like you and me, chosen for the purpose," said Partow, "is worthily to direct the courage that goes with moral right. The overt act of war must come from them by violating our frontier, not in the African jungle but here. Even when the burglar fingers the window-sash we shall not fire—no, not until he enters our house. When he does, you would have a message go out to our people that will set them quivering with indignation?"

"Yes, and I would let the names of our soldiers who fall first be known and how they fell, their backs to their frontier homes and their faces to the foe."

Our very liberality in giving news will help us to cover the military secrets which we desire to preserve," Partow said, with slow emphasis. "We shall hold back what we please, confident of the people's trust. Good policy that, yes! But enough! Your orders are ready, in detail, I believe. You have nothing to add?"

"No, sir, nothing; at least, not until war begins."

"Very well. We shall have the orders issued at the proper moment," concluded Partow. "And Westerling is going to find," he proceeded after a thoughtful pause, "that a man is readier to die fighting to hold his own threshold than fighting to take another man's. War is not yet solely an affair of machinery and numbers. The human element is still uppermost. Give me your hand—no, not that one, not the one you shake hands with—the one wounded in action!"

Partow inclosed the stiffened fingers in his own with something of the caress which an old bear that is in very good humor might give to a promising cub.

"I have planned, planned, planned for this time. The world shall soon know, as the elements of it go into the crucible test, whether it is well done or not. I want to live to see the day when the last charge made against our trenches is beaten back. Then they may throw this old body onto the rubbish heap as soon as they please—it is a fat, unwieldly behemoth of an old body!"

"No, no, it isn't!" Lanstron objected hotly. He was seeing only what most people saw after talking with Partow for a few minutes, his fine, intelligent eyes and beautiful forehead.

"All that I wanted of the body was to feed my brain," Partow continued, heedless of the interruption. "I have watched my mind as a navigator watches a barometer. I have been ready at the first sign that it was losing its grip to give up. Yet I have felt that my body would go on feeding my brain and that to the last moment of consciousness, when suddenly the body collapses, I should have self-possession and energy of mind. Under the coming strain the shock may come, as a cord snaps. At that instant my successor will take up my work where I leave it off.

"The old fogy who has aimed to join experience to youth chooses youth. You took your medicine without grumbling in the disagreeable but vitally important position of chief of intelligence. Now you—there, don't tremble with stage fright!" For Lanstron's hand was quivering in Partow's grasp, while his face was that of a man stunned.

"You are to be at the right hand of this old body," continued Partow. "You are to go with me to the front; to sleep in the room next to mine; to be always at my side, and, finally, you are to promise that if ever the old body fails in its duty to the mind, if ever you see that I am not standing up to the strain, you are to say so to me and I give you my word that I shall let you take charge."

Lanstron was too stunned to speak for a moment. The arrangement seemed a hideous joke; a refinement of cruelty inconceivable. It was expecting him to tell Atlas that he was old and to take the weight of the world off the giant's shoulders.

"Have you lost your patriotism?" demanded Partow. "Are you afraid? afraid to tell me the truth? Afraid of duty? Afraid in your youth of the burden that I bear in age?"

His fingers closed in on Lanstron's with such force that the grip was painful.

"Promise!" he commanded.

"I promise!" Lanstron said with a throb.

"That's it! That's the way! That's the kind of soldier I like," Partow declared with change of tone, and he rose from his chair with a spring that was a delight to Lanstron in its proof of the physical vigor so stoutly denied. "We have a lot to say to each other today," he added; "but first I am going to show you the whole bag of tricks."

His arm crooked in Lanstron's, they went along the main corridor of the staff office and entered a vault having a single chair and a small table in the center and lined by sections of numbered pigeonholes, each with a combination lock. At the base of one section was a small safe. It was not

"It Is All There, My Life, My Dreams, My Ambitions."

the first time that Lanstron had been in this vault. He had the combination of two of the sections of pigeonholes, aerostatics and intelligence. The rest belonged to other divisions.

"The safe is my own, as you know. No one opens it; no one knows what is in it but me," said Partow, taking from it an envelope and a manuscript, which he laid on the table. "There you have all that is in my brain—the whole plan. The envelope contains the combinations of all the pigeonholes, if you wish to look up any details."

"Thank you!" Lanstron half whispered. It was all he could think of to say.

"And you will find that there is more than you thought, perhaps; the reason why I have fought hard to remain chief of staff; why—" Partow continued in a voice that had the sepulchral uncanniness of a threat long nursed now breaking free of the bondage of years within the sound-proof walls. "But—" he broke off suddenly as if he distrusted even the security of the vault. "Yes, it is all there—my life's work, my dream, my ambition, my plan!"

Lanstron heard the lock slide in the door as Partow went out and he was alone with the army's secrets. As he read Partow's firm handwriting, many parts fell together, many moves on a chessboard grew clear. His breath came faster, he bent closer over the table, he turned back pages to go over them again. Every sentence dropped home in his mind like a bolt in a socket. Unconscious of the passage of time, he did not heed the door open or realize Partow's presence until he felt Partow's hand on his shoulder.

"I see that you didn't look into any of the pigeonholes," the chief of staff observed.

Lanstron pressed his finger-tips on the manuscript significantly.

"No. It is all there!"

"The thing being to carry it out!" said Partow. "God with us!" he added devoutly.

CHAPTER VIII.

Close to the White Posts.

On Saturday evening the 128th regiment of the Grays was mustered in field accoutrements and a full supply of cartridges. In the darkness the first battalion marched out at right angles to the main road that ran through La Tir and South La Tir. At length Company B, deployed in line of skirmishers, lay down to sleep on its arms.

"We wait here for the word," Fracasse, the captain, whispered to his senior lieutenant. "If it comes, our objective is the house and the old castle on the hill above the town."

The tower of the church showed dimly when a pale moon broke through a cloud. By its light Hugo Mallin saw on his left the pinched and characterless features of Peterkin. A few yards ahead was a white stone post.

"That's their side over there!" whispered the banker's son, who was next to Peterkin.

"When we cross war begins," said the manufacturer's son.

"I wonder if they are expecting us!" said the judge's son a trifle huskily, in an attempt at humor, though he was not given to humor.

"Just waiting to throw bouquets!" whispered the laborer's son. He, too, was not given to humor and he, too, spoke a trifle huskily.

"And we'll fix bayonets when we start and they will run at the sight of our steel!" said Eugene Aronson. He and Hugo alone, not excepting Pilzer, the butcher's son, spoke in their natural voices. The others were trying to make their voices sound natural, while Pilzer's voice had developed a certain ferocity, and the liver patch on his cheek twitched more frequently. "Why, Company B is in front! We have the post of honor, and maybe our company will win the most glory of any in the regiment!" Eugene added. "Oh, we'll beat them! The bullet is not made that will get me!"

"Your service will be over in time for you to help with the spring planting, Eugene," whispered Hugo, who was apparently preoccupied with many detached thoughts.

"And you to be at home sucking lollipops!" Pilzer growled to Hugo.

"That would be better than murdering my fellowman to get his property," Hugo answered, so soberly that it did not seem to his comrades that he was joking this time. Pilzer's snarling exclamation of "White feather!" came in the midst of a chorus of indignation.

Captain Fracasse, who had heard only the disturbance without knowing the cause, interfered in a low, sharp tone:

"Silence! As I have told you before, silence! We don't want them to know that we are here. Go to sleep! You may get no rest tomorrow night!"

But little Peterkin, the question in his mind breaking free of his lips, unwittingly asked:

"Shall—shall we fight in the morning?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows!" answered Fracasse. "We wait on orders, ready to do our duty. There may be no war. Don't let me hear another peep from you!"

Now all closed their eyes. In front of them was vast silence which seemed to stretch from end to end of the frontier, while to the rear was the rumble of switching railway trains and the rumble of provision trains and artillery on the roads, and in the distance on the plain the headlight of a locomotive cut a swath in the black night. But the breathing of most of the men was not that of slumber, though Eugene and Pilzer slept soundly. Hours passed. Occasional restless movements told of efforts to force sleep by changing position.

"It's the waiting that's sickening!" exploded the manufacturer's son under his breath, desperately.

"So I say. I'd like to be at it and done with the suspense!" said the doctor's son.

"They say if you are shot through the head you don't know what killed you it's so quick. Think of that!" exclaimed Peterkin, huddling closer to Hugo and shivering.

(To be continued)

TEACHERS' EXAMINATIONS

Teachers' examinations are held in Medina on the firrst Saturday of September, October, January, March, April, May, and on the last Friday of June and August.

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COX AND WILLIS

James M. Cox asks election for another term as governor.

Certain projects for the common welfare already under way need to be completed, and the question before the Ohio voter is whether Cox is the man to do the work.

Two years ago the people of Ohio set themselves to the task of cleaning out the accumulated dry rot of reaction in the laws that governed them. They tore up their old and outworn constitution, and substituted a new one that has placed this commonwealth in the forefront of the movement toward social justice and public cleanliness.

They took into their own hands the right to make laws and unmake them, to name candidates for office, to establish home rule in communities where it is desired.

They shook up the courts, with a view toward speedier judgments. They made possible the enactment of a real workmen's compensation law, and a mothers' pension law. They abolished contract labor in prisons. They made it possible to drive from the state the crooks who had fleeced the people out of many millions by the sale of fraudulent securities.

To make many of these amendments operative, it was necessary that the legislature enact many new laws to fit the new conditions, and to repeal old ones, which did not fit.

When Cox was elected governor, he pledged himself to the exact and honest fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the state government by those constitutional amendments.

It would have been easy for a reactionary and tricky governor, in control of the legislative majority, to tangle up the big job of law-making in such a way as to annul nearly every reform demanded.

It would have been easy for a politics-playing legislature, abetted by corporations, to do the same thing under the nose of a weak governor.

It is a matter of record that Governor Cox sat on top of that legislature, amid howls of "bossism" from the reactionaries, and grunts of protest from the legislators, who considered themselves overworked, until every last item of his program had been enacted into law.

It was no small task, demanding the services of a governor with an iron backbone.

Men who were in this city while the workmen's compensation bill was being enacted into law will not soon forget the swarms of powerful rich men who came here to see the governor and "stop this outrage," as they expressed it. They didn't stop it.

Big interests fought practically every reform measure submitted, aided by feeble, indifferent or reactionary legislators.

It was a notable thing, and a new thing in Ohio, where governors and legislatures have so often sidestepped their pledges, that Cox did as he promised, in the face of uncommon discouragements and difficulties.

At the end of his term, he was able to show a balance of over $8,000,000 in the state treasury, and he called the legislature together in special session to reduce the state tax rate to the smallest figure in the history of Ohio.

The new state penitentiary now is in process of creation. Its aim is to turn out men instead of criminals.

The results of other reform legislation are just beginning to be felt by the people.

It is essential that these reforms do not fall into the hands of their enemies.

Frank B. Willis, Cox's chief opponent for the governorship, insists that "the dominant issue in Ohio is the repudiation or indorsement of the present state administration."

Willis is at least partly right.

Cox, as the stronger man of the two, naturally must be the center of discussion.

Yet it is worth the while of the voter to consider Willis, too, to find out what sort of administration might be expected from him if he were elected.

Willis was in the legislature in 1900.

He voted in favor of prison contract labor. He voted against the eight-hour day for workmen on public works. He failed to vote at all on the bill to safeguard machinery for the protection of the employe.

He voted against the bill to abolish the infamous "fellow-servant" rule. In other words, he voted in favor of the employer and the indemnity insurance companies, and against the worker, when progressive men were trying to abolish the rule of law which had left destitute the families of thousands of maimed or killed workmen.

He helped kill a bill to protect employes from the results of negligence on the part of their employers.

He voted against a bill which required a vote of the people before street railway franchises could be granted or extended.

He reported, as a member of the taxation committee, in favor of "indefinite postponement" of bills that sought to put concealed stocks and bonds on the tax duplicate.

He voted to smother a bill that would forbid members of the legislature to accept railroad passes.

So far as his national record as a member of congress is concerned, he has none to speak of. He has been merely one of those colorless congressmen who do little, good or bad, to attract the attention of the public.

As between Cox, the reactionary Willis and the uncertain Garfield there is only one choice for men who wish their state to progress and who fear the forces of reaction.

That choice is Cox.

The above editorial appeared simultaneously in every one of the Scripps-McRae papers in Ohio. It was used as here reprinted in a double-column, full-page editorial in the Cleveland Press, the Cincinnati Post, the Columbus Citizen, the Toledo News-Bee and the Akron Press. These papers form the strongest and most influential, single organization of newspapers in the country. Their support cannot be secured by any influence and is given only where the cause is right in the judgment of the editors. The preference expressed in the editorial here given is based on careful investigation and mature judgment.